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ABSTRACT

To determine whether speech communication is a true academic subject, it is necessary to note the three traits that characterize a true academic subject: (1) a curriculum designed to promote knowledge and understanding rather than manual or practical skills; (2) a logically integrated series of courses that begin at the elementary school level and continue through college; and (3) a body of knowledge of its own that springs from the investigative and research functions of its scholars. In speech, practical skills are emphasized at the elementary and secondary school levels, but at the college level, this emphasis is sometimes made at the expense of knowledge and understanding. Speech communication does have a body of knowledge springing from the investigative and research function of its scholars--a traditional one, originating with Aristotle and coming down through Cicero, Quintilian, and others--and it is in need of earnest revitalization efforts. But as quantitative scholars are questioning some of the precepts that the profession holds sacred, the profession can no longer make ideas acceptable in the academic world by referring to historical tradition or unsystematic observations. The profession needs new confirmation procedures. Such new procedures will, undoubtedly, come from these quantitative scholars, who will help revitalize the profession.(HTH)

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SPEECH: ITS PRESENT STATUS AND ITS FUTURE PROSPECT

Wayne C. Minnick

Florida State University

Wayne Minnick was the keynote speaker at the 1967 meeting of the Oklahoma Speech Association. Dr. Minnick, President of the Speech Association of America, and Professor of Speech and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Florida State University, was introduced by Roger Nebergall of the University of Oklahoma. A tape recording Dr. Minnick's remarks was preserved by Fred Tewell. The following transcript was prepared and edited by N. L. Reinsch, Jr.

I at the outset would like to acknowledge as sincerely as I can my pleasure in being able to be in Oklahoma. One of the rewards of being president of an association like the Speech Association of America is that it affords one invitations to visit many of the state Speech organizations. And I have visited six or seven of these. I must say honestly that this appears to be one of the most vigorous and viable of the organizations that I have visited. I compare the group that is here today with the group that we customarily assemble in the state of Florida which is a state with a considerably larger population, I think, than the state of Oklahoma. And we don't do any better than you do in terms of attendance. So I think that's a tribute to the vigor and the enthusiasm of the leaders of this state association and I'd like to pay tribute to them for their leadership.

When I was asked by Roger Nebergall to deliver this speech, I said

I would speak upon the topic "Speech: Its Present Status and Its Future Prospect." And when I made a commitment to speak on this subject, I also made a commitment to speak honestly and candidly about the status of the discipline as I saw it. So I assure you as I speak here this noon that I will probably say somethings that may be a little bit disturbing. I don't mean them to be disturbing; I mean simply to state as clearly as I can the situation in the discipline as I see it.

Since I have become a Dean, I have been making a collection of Dean's stories. And I heard one about two weeks ago at the American Council of Education meeting that seems to crystalize the predicament in which I find myself here speaking candidly to you this morning. It seems that a young man, a veteran of the war in Viet Nam, had returned to the campus to study. He was faced with a particularly irksome regulation, something that he wanted to do in his program that the rules of the college forbade, so he went to see the Dean. He tried to talk the Dean out of sticking to this rule. The Dean, however, was adamant and said he would simply have to insist that the young man meet the required regulation. And as he became more insistent, the young man became more and more incensed and more and more insistent that the Dean make an exception. Finally, the Dean said to him, "I am sorry to tell you sir, I shall have to stick to the regulation. The only consolation possible for you to take revenge on me in the near future by coming out and spitting on my grave." And the young man looked at the Dean for a moment and said, "Sir, the time I spent in the Army provided me with a firm resolve never to stand in line for anything."

Now I hope, in my honesty and candor this morning I'm not going to create a situation in which people will be standing in line to take their ultimate revenge on me. But, I do want to look at the Speech profession

because I think we can get a little clearer view of ourselves if we see ourselves the way others see us. And, I would like to start this examination of the present status of Speech in America by citing a couple of instances of how other people see the Speech profession.

One of them occurred on my campus and I refer to it as the general education crisis at Florida State University. Now, all of you are familiar with the general education notion or the basic studies idea, a core of courses, in most universities consisting of maybe 40 or 45 semester hours of basic courses that represent our cultural heritage and that we feel all students ought to be exposed to. At Florida State University, one unit in the general education core course structure was a unit called "communications." And speech and English composition were a part of this communications core. When the general education requirements were revised a year and a half ago, we had a very hard struggle in the Faculty Senate, first of all, to preserve the whole concept of communication in general education. It was seriously threatened by people from the sciences, the social sciences, and other areas whose assertion was, "Why should we be teaching communication on the college level? Students ought to know basic English and basic speech when they come to the university; and if they have to be instructed in those matters when they get there, it should be on a non-credit basis."

Well, I am pleased to say that we successfully overrode this by arguing vehemently that there is a substative study of communication and that we were in the process of changing our orientation in the basic speech course and in the basic English course from purely skills to a subject-matter orientation. Nevertheless, the experience indicated that administrators and people in other disciplines are scrutinizing Speech

and that we have to be prepared to show that we are a true academic discipline and to defend ourselves when we are confronted with such challenges.

Now, a much more serious challenge is the essence of my second example. This challenge occurred in 1964 in the state of California, which, incidentially now, is the largest state in the Union and has the biggest educational structure of any state. The state legislature adopted a new piece of legislation in 1964 requiring each secondary school teacher to have a major and a minor subject-matter field. The legislation specified that one of the subject-matter fields could be in a non-academic field. As a result of this legislation, the Board of Education of the state of California had to categorize subject-matter fields into academic and non-academic categories; so they went ahead and did so. In the academic field, they had such familiar disciplines as math, biological science, history, English, and so on. In the area of non-academic subjects, they grouped such subjects as typing, physical education, band, home economics, shop, business, and--hold your breath--speech. Speech was categorized with the subjects I have just listed as a non-academic subject. Well, the speech educators of the state of California immediately appealed this decision of the Board of Education, and they collected a group of distinguished educators from the college and high school levels in the state of California. They supplemented this group with J. Jeffery Auer from the national office of the Speech Assoication of America, who then, I think, was first vice president of the Speech Association. And by dint of much persuasive argument and a series of meetings with the Board of Education, they succeeded in getting this decision reversed and speech was thenceforth classified as an academic subject. But it was a close call. And we were not automatically regarded as an academic subject. Disciplines

like math, history, and science are accorded that status without argument. We had to prove our case.

Now, I submit that these two examples which I have just given you suggest that, to some degree in the academic world, we are a little bit on the defensive and that we have to be careful in various contexts that we put our case to administrators convincingly and with viable evidence. And so, what I would like to do in my pursuit of my topic is to look at Speech as it exists in our universities, colleges, secondary schools, and in some cases our elementary schools, and see if it meets the criteria of a true academic subject.

Now, what is a true academic subject? And does speech meet these criteria? Well, it seems to me there are three things that characterize a true academic subject. First of all, a true academic subject has a curriculum which is designed to promote knowledge and understanding rather than manual or practical skills. Secondly, an academic discipline has a logically integrated series of courses that begin in the elementary schools and run on up through the college and graduate level, a logically integrated series of courses which lead to the maximum intellectual development of the student. And third and final, an academic discipline has a body of knowledge all of its own which springs from the investigative and research functions of its scholars.

Now, you can argue with these criteria. But let's just assume for a moment that this is a fair representation of what an academic discipline ought to be and then look at the field of Speech as we all know it and ask ourselves, "How well does it measure up to these criteria?" Do we emphasize, for instance, manual or practical skill more than we emphasize knowledge and understanding? Well, I guess my answer to this would be that I think we do overemphasize skills, that we overemphasize

skills frequently at the expense of knowledge and understanding. I think there is a proper place for the teaching of skills. And don't construe me to say that I don't think we should be teaching skills. I think we should. I think that the elementary and secondary level is the place where students acquire the tools of their society and that communication is one of the most important tools. So they must be taught the skills of communication at those levels.

But I would like to suggest that sometimes we ought to be teaching knowledge and understanding as well. I refer to such things as the debate tournament and the emphasis that we put upon debating. This is true not only of the secondary school level, but also of the college level. And sometimes it seems that we are more interested in producing facile, glib, debate team winners than we are in providing clear knowledge and understanding of the process of communication and the importance of debating and forensics in our society. The one-act play contest is another area in which I suggest that we are maybe more interested in teaching skills than we are interested in the significance of the dramatic literature with which we deal. Oral reading contests and the various others--in fact, the whole contest idea that pervades much of the speech activity--I think have a kind of peforative connotation to them. Administrators and people outside the field of speech tend to equate that kind of activity on our part with the kind of activity that goes on in the athletic department. And so they naturally begin to think of speech as being a skills-oriented field rather than a subject-matter field. Because we award trophies; we award cups; we have contests; we declare winners; and so on.

Now in the English department, just to use a comparison, we do teach

(continued on 2nd page following)

SIX EPISODES FROM THE FUTURE

Terri Hopkins and Dee Rendon

Oklahoma State University

The cartoons on this and the following pages were prepared as part of a project for an undergraduate course in mediated interpersonal communication.

"SO THIS IS THE LATEST IN OFFICE AUTOMATION !?!"

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skills. We teach skills down on the elementary level. And we teach skills on the secondary level. But in addition to this, we teach literature. When a student takes composition, he also takes, concurrently or at least subsequently, a pretty solid indoctrination into literature. That literature is the content of the field, the cultural heritage, whereas the composition is the skill. Now, what I would like to know is what is the equivalent of the study of literature in the field of speech, particularly on the elementary and secondary school level? How many of your students really read speech literature? I don't know. Maybe its different in your school but my guess is that in most of our schools the students who take courses in speech read a textbook on how to make a speech or they read a textbook on how to act in a play or how to put on make-up or how to build a flat or paint it or how to do all those other skills which are necessary. But very little attention is given to the actual substantive part of the field, the literature or the content.

Now, let me turn to the college level and raise the question of whether we're teaching content and knowledge on the college level or whether we're teaching a skill. I think, obviously, as we get up to the higher undergraduate levels and the graduate school level we do teach content and subject-matter. But it is true, it seems to me, that most of our basic courses are skills-oriented courses. They're public speaking courses. And those public speaking courses do much of the same things that many of the high school courses do. They get the student up on his feet. He delivers a speech. You talk about how he delivered the speech, what he can do to improve his bodily action, what he can do to improve his voice and gestures, and so on. I'm wondering if we are, on the college level, not doing ourselves a disservice by persisting with the skills-oriented basic course. And it goes beyond the basic course

too. Look at the ordinary college curriculum. You go from a fundamentals or basic speech course to a public speaking course perhaps to an advanced public speaking course, to a course in argumentation, to a course in discussion. All of which are essentially skills-oriented courses. They're how-to-do. And a large part of the activity that goes on in the classroom is an activity in learning to do the things I've just talked about. A student gets up and debates. He practices the skill like a basketball player stands in front of the basket and throws the ball to hone and sharpen his skill in making baskets.

It seems to me that in drama on the college level we have a very sharp dichotomy between skills and content-oriented curricula. And I

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think it is a fair statement to say the trend on the college level, in the past few years in the teaching of dramatics, is more and more toward the professional dramatic school kind of approach than it is toward the liberal arts content-oriented approach. Many of the colleges and universities I know have been making alliances with professional theatres. I can point to my own institution as one example. Our Asolo Theatre Festival, which is now a year-round operation, has become an equity company. And frankly it is professional in its outlook. By professional I mean it is professional in the sense that its aim and purpose is to achieve a high degree of theatrical skills in the students that it turns out. And there's less and less emphasis on the role of aesthetics and art in society, in the understanding of the theories of dramatics, and in relating those theories of dramatics to the problems and difficulties of our day. I think I could multiply the example on our campus by reference to numerous other universities--the University of Minnesota, the University of Michigan. I think there are a dozen.

Well, I simply am raising the question, you see, about whether we meet the criterion that administrators use when they look at us and ask the question "Do we have a curriculum that emphasizes manual and practical skills more than knowledge and understanding?" And I think in many cases the conclusion of the administrator is that we do emphasize the manual and practical skills at the expense of knowledge and understanding. This accounts for some of the adverse attitudes toward Speech, particularly where Speech is found in a liberal arts context. Now it may not be that all of speech should be in a liberal arts context. Maybe we ought to look to the future when theatre will perhaps be in a fine arts context--instead of a liberal arts context--where professionalism is a legitimate aim and goal. But I'm looking at it as it now exists

in most institutions where it still exists in the [liberal] arts context.

I think that we need to ask ourselves then a second question. It is related to the emphasis of our coursework and the logical integration of our coursework. That is "Do we have a sufficient body of knowledge springing from the research and investigative function of our scholars?"

I think we do have a body of knowledge. Whether it is a sufficient and significant body of knowledge, I don't know. It depends on your point of view. I think our body of knowledge is a traditional one. It is traditional in the sense that it originated with Aristotle and has come down to us from Aristotle's time through Cicero, Quintilian,

"CHECK-UPS JUST AREN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE!"

down through the Medieval period, and through a more contemporary period. But when you get right down to it, the doctrine that we have as our basic body of knowledge is essentially Arsitotilian. It is essentially unchanged from the time of Aristotle to the present day. Now I will admit that there have been some efforts to revitalize the classical doctrine of rhetoric. But these have come largely from other fields rather than from the Speech field. The work of I. A. Richards and of Kenneth Burke, and of Stephen Toulmin in argument, and of Marshall McLuhan in the area of media--these are people from outside the field of Speech. I think it's something of an indictment of our area as a scholarly and investigative activity that the modifications of the classical doctrine that we have experienced have come from other sources.

I have a new book that I just received a few days ago. It's by Wayne Thompson at the University of Texas--many of you know Wayne Thompson. He was editor of Speech Monographs for a long time and [is] a well known scholar in our field. The book is called Quantitative Research in Public Address and Communication. In this book, Wayne is addressing himself to the question that I asked a moment ago, "Do we have a significant body of knowledge in our field?" And I think he comes to some interesting conclusions. Or at least he makes some interesting observations about the body of knowledge in the field of Speech. I would, with your indulgence, like to read a paragraph and see what you think of it:

> The history of rhetoric is of long periods of apathetic acceptance of tradition and occasional short periods of creative ferment. Only the exceptional man, in any age and in any field, poses major challenges and/or creates significant innovations; all lesser men, even those competent, well-trained, and responsible, find the acceptance of existing doctrine easier and more comfortable than the generation of new formulations. In about twenty centuries only eighteenth-century Great Britain produced any real intellectual ferment

> about rhetorical theory, and in the nearly two hundred years since then, the spirit of challenge has died and has not been renewed. ...Perhaps classical rhetoric with its good sense and flexibility is the best that man can devise, but at least scholars should be in earnest in their efforts to challenge and to improve. An academic discipline that repeats the past with changes limited to scattered modifications based on undirected observations and personal beliefs is a static discipline.

I think that's a rather severe indictment. I guess what I've done in the last few minutes is to suggest that we do need to take a hard look at the field of Speech, at what its present status is, and to ask ourselves if it is to our liking.

Now, I would like to turn to future prospects, and acknowledge as I do so that a lot of what I see in the present status of the discipline is not entirely to my liking. But what about our future prospects? I

think our future prospects are brightened considerably when we consider some of the new research directions that are being taken in our field. I am referring specifically to the efforts of the quantitative scholars in our field, those scholars who are oriented behavioristically. I think they are beginning to provide us with a new and important body of research. Now, there are some people who say we should stick with the old, rhetorical/critical method. And they resent the approach of these brash new scholars with their figure counting and their reliance upon computer techniques and quantitative measures. But I submit that these people are providing us with the kind of ammunition which will help us to survive as a discipline. And they are growing in numbers.

I did just a little unsystematic survey when I prepared this speech concerning the role of quantitative studies in our field. I went back to the 1949 August and September issues of Speech Monographs. I chose 1949 because that was the year I graduated from graduate school and got my degree. I looked at those two issues and discovered that of 22 articles published in 1949 in those two issues only seven had some kind of quantitative measures in them. And then I turned to March and June of 1966, which were comparable months, and I found that there were 21 articles published there 14 of which were in a quantitative vein. Now that represents a substantial increase. I am prepared to suggest that this is indicative of the future of our field. I think we shall find that the future of our field will see a shift in emphasis from the old rhetorical/critical approach with its body of knowledge drawn from Aristotle to the new insights and the new points of view. Perhaps I might say the new rhetoric which will be provided by these quantitative, behavioristically-oriented scholars.

Now I know that there are pitfalls in this kind of research. There

are pitfalls in any kind of human endeavor. But I do say that these quantitative scholars are questioning some of the precepts that we have held more or less sacrosanct since the day of Aristotle. They are demanding confirmation of ideas that we felt had been sufficiently confirmed. [But] we can no longer make our ideas acceptable in the academic world by references to historical tradition or unsystematic observation. We have got to have new confirmation procedures. And those new confirmation procedures will probably come from our quantitative scholars. I think the least that these people will be able to do for us is to confirm and test some of the old ideas that we have held and inherited from Aristotle. I think it can do more than that, however. I think that at best the quantitative scholars in our field

can do several things for us. First, I think they can provide the raw materials for a new non-Aristotilian rhetoric, a new non-Aristotilian view of communication in all of its aspects. Sitting on this platform, to my right, is Roger Nebergall. He, in collaboration with the Sheriffs at Oklahoma University, has published a book on the social involvement approach to persuasive communication. I think this is just one example of the kind of contribution that the quantitative scholars in our field are now making and can continue to make. I don't know that we have yet accumulated enough experimental evidence to develop an entirely new rhetoric. But I think we are moving in that direction and ultimately such a rhetoric will be written. And men like Roger Nebergall will help to provide the raw materials for it.

Second, I think these quantitative scholars can help us to revitalize our curriculum. I was critical earlier of some of the things we've done in our curriculum (the skills orientation of it) and some of the looseness of it. I think, for instance, that we in Speech need to look seriously at our curriculum and ask ourselves if that curriculum really contains what we ought to be teaching about speech and oral communication. I think we're behind other disciplines in this respect. We all know about the new math. My daughter is taking new math and she comes home and talks about things that I never heard of when I went to school and studied math. She also takes something called "biological sciences curriculum study." And it's unlike the biological science I studied when I was in high school. Yet I submit that if I had a child who was taking speech in high school, she would come home and be telling me the same things that I was taught in speech when I went to high school. So I think we're falling behind. Now I think that the new evidence that we are accumulating from our quantitative approaches

to speech, from models like the communication theorists are devising, can revitalize our curriculum. It can revitalize it on all levels. And I think very swiftly and surely, we need to do that. I look at college catalogs and I still see courses in the majority of our college catalogs that have been in the curriculum for decades. There's nothing wrong with having these in the curriculum. Don't mistake me. They still belong there. But where are the courses, for instance, labelled such things as "communication theory and process," "nonverbal communication," "interpersonal communication," "cross-cultural communication?" I find a paucity of these in the college catalogs. And because the colleges don't teach them, they never get down into the secondary school level because the college trains the secondary school and elementary school teacher.

Well, I am optimistic about the future outlook of our field. I think the quantitative scholars in our field can help us to change our image in the eyes of other academicians and in the eyes of the public generally. I don't know whether any of you read an article that was published by Barnett Baskerville at the University of Washington some time ago. The title of the article was "I Teach Speech." And he said that when he got on a public conveyance like a railroad train or an airplane--that when you sit down next to someone and the man turns to you and says, "Who are you?" And you say, "Well, I'm a teacher." And he replies, "What do you teach?" If you're a math teacher you say, "I teach math," and he knows what you are teaching and he starts talking to you about math. Or if you say, "I teach chemistry," he knows what you're teaching and he starts talking to you about chemistry. But what happens when you say, "I teach speech?" He says, "Oh, my God, I better watch out. I have to be correct in what I say." And he starts talking in a how-now-brown-cow, rain-falls-mainly-in-the-plain tone of voice. And so you see he has that skills orientation toward Speech too. He has a Dale Carnegieish notion of what we are dealing with. And, of course, we can't afford to have that on our college and university campuses if we're going to survive as an academic discipline. And so I think that the quantitative scholars have set a fire under us--they're challenging a lot of our basic assumptions.

Now, I'm not suggesting by saying this that we are going to dispense with the old rhetorical doctrine of Aristotle entirely. Obviously, we are not. There should be a very close and integrated association between these two. And I think the two together will be able to change the image of Speech so that in future days when you sit down in an airplane seat next to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at some neighboring

university and he says to you, "What do you teach?" You can say, "I teach speech." And he'll say, "You know the field of communications is a fascinating field and you people are dealing with some of the most critical problems that the world has to deal with." Now wouldn't it be wonderful if we had that kind of change in orientation on the part of people outside the field looking in at us?

Well, I've been critical and I've been frank and candid. I meant to be. I gave this speech once in Kentucky and I'm afraid I overstated the case. People were ready to throw rocks at me when I quit.

Let me leave you with this thought: When I was boy I read Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island and I was fascinated with it and with Stevenson as a writer and so I read everything I could get my hands on by Robert Louis Stevenson. And you know he was a poet too. He wrote Child's Garden of Verse--many of you are familiar with that. But he wrote poetry for adults too. I remember one of the poems he wrote about a scholar, about the man who thinks about his time and about its problems, and about the discipline with which he has allied himself. And how sometimes, this man feels kind of lonely and insecure because he is a thinker. And he wrote a little poem--I wish I could remember all of it but I can't. I remember the last stanza. It went something like this:

"Sanctions and tales dislimbed like mist
About this amazed evangelist
Who stood unshook in age and youth
Upon one pinpoint of the truth."

Now, I don't know how much truth there is in what I've said today. I hope there's one pinpoint somewhere there.